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Galleries; Memories Of the Old Mill Dream:[FINAL Edition]

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What could be less inviting, you might ask, than looking at pictures of abandoned steel mills? Any such thoughts are quickly dispelled by Anderson Scott's memorable Ektacolor photographs at the Jones Troyer Fitzpatrick Gallery. Last year this former Washington photographer traveled to different parts of the country, training his sights on those vast structures that not so long ago were the glory of American industry. The result is a moving study of loss and desolation from which Scott has nonetheless wrested an awesome beauty.

With a keen eye for composition and the transforming effects of light, he has succeeded in producing images that transcend the documentary. In one of the finest photographs in the show, which was taken at the National Works in Pennsylvania, a huge piece of machinery dominates a room of deathly stillness, the light from a window casting a lovely glow on the green patination of the abandoned hulk. In another strong composition, light falls on the rims of four metal cylinders on a workbench, shattering the pervading darkness.

No human beings inhabit these photographs, just as they are now absent from places like the Duquesne Works, also in Pennsylvania, where Scott captures the eerie silence of a deserted office in the mill. Within this glass-partitioned space the empty drawers of a desk haphazardly pulled out reveal not even a scrap of paper to indicate the business activity that once took place here.

In ironic contrast to Scott's images are those in an adjoining room by early-20th-century photographers who celebrated the heyday of American industry. Notable among them are "Forge Shop" and "Refinery" by Fred Korth, whose camera artistry in a heroic mold seems light-years removed from Scott's elegiac portrait.

Touby at Alex

It's the right time of year for the "Cherry Blossom Series" by New York artist Linda Touby at the Alex Gallery. According to the exhibition brochure, these paintings and works on paper were all inspired while the artist was sitting under the trees in Central Park. Granted that New York cherry blossoms may need to be a lot more assertive to gain attention in the Big Apple, Touby's paintings evoke none of the delicate evanescent beauty of these flowering trees.

Not only the style of painting but the colors she has chosen to use seem at odds with the subject. This is gestural abstraction à la Hans Hofmann, with all the pulsating energy of that school of painting but too little rigor in organizing the wide swaths and dapples of color into a cohesive composition. Touby makes her own paint, mixing beeswax with pigment. The resulting colors - vibrant blues and greens, purples and reds - have an individual richness but collide with one another like traffic during rush hour on the Cross-Bronx Expressway.

Touby's works on paper are quite another story. Obviously an artist may have a more ambitious agenda for a large-scale painting (and some of Touby's are fairly large) compared with works on paper less than half their size. However, an entirely different artistic sensibility seems to be operating here. Where the paintings are strident, the colors sometimes jarring, the works on paper have a delicacy, both of color and composition, that makes them quite appealing, and certainly more in tune with the subject at hand.

One can usually make a connection between an artist's works on paper and his or her paintings. Think of Cezanne's drawings of Mount St. Victoire or those of Matisse right on down to the work of contemporary artists like Jasper Johns. If Touby's contradictory approach to abstraction reflects a search for a mature style, the far less derivative works on paper seem the way to go.

Urueta at Kimberly

There are only three paintings by Cordelia Urueta in the group show of Latin American artists at the Kimberly Gallery, but even that small number is sufficient to affirm the continuing power of her work. Now well into her eighties, she calls to mind the words of the 19th-century Japanese artist Hokusai, who used a signature that translates: "Old man, mad about painting." For Urueta, it's a love affair that's been going on for more than 60 years, bringing her accolades in Mexico as one of the country's leading abstract painters. Like most contemporary Latin American artists, however, Urueta is not widely known in the United States. Searching the Art Index for the past 10 years, for example, turns up a paltry number of articles in national art magazines and journals about present-day Mexican painters, and none at all about Urueta.

In her recent paintings at the Kimberly the brilliant fields of color that have been the hallmark of Urueta's style are in full play. Perhaps the most outstanding is "El Ojo del Tiempo" ("The Eye of Time," 1990), in which shimmering fields of blue and coppery brown are the backdrop for an all-seeing blue eye enclosed in a lighter blue square in the center of the composition. In "El Hechizo" ("The Bewitched") a monolithic abstract figure painted a powerful deep red, and bearing a sneaking resemblance to a Henry Moore figure turned sideways, rests on a field of glowing orange. Hovering above is a blue moon that has cast the spell. Urueta's palette turns to somber hues of brown and gray in "Barco Perdido" ("Lost Ship"), where the abstract form appears cast adrift, uncertain of reaching safe harbor in this world or the next.

For now we will have to be content with these three paintings, or with looking at the color plates of her work in a monograph by Elisa Garcia Barragan, "Cordelia Urueta y el Color," recently published in Spanish by the National University of Mexico. In her book Barragan relates a story about Andre Malraux, who attended an exhibition in Paris in the early 1960s that included one of Urueta's works. "Here is a painter," he is reported to have said. There's still no doubt about it.

[Illustration]

PHOTO CAPTION:Detail of Anderson Scott's photo of National Works, Pa., at Jones Troyer.

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